

A PLEA FOR PIONEERS.

By Robert Bell, B.A.Sc., M.D., LL.D.,

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF THE GEOLOGICAL SURVEY.

I wish to say a few words in defence of pioneer explorers and surveyors. We may excuse or pass over the ignorant remarks of those who are not supposed to know anything of the surveyor's work, or of the difficulties he has to overcome; but when criticisms come from those of our own calling, they deserve a word of notice. It is, perhaps, too common a failing to point out, and perhaps ridicule, the imperfections of the first attempts to map a new country. Does it ever occur to those who indulge in such presumptions of their own superiority, to ask themselves the question, could they do any better or indeed half so well if placed under similar circumstances?

It is no doubt true that the preliminary maps of a hitherto unknown district do sometimes contain singular and unaccountable errors, even when these have been the work of the most careful and conscientious men. When we remember that important points in regard to the construction of such maps depend on single observations, with no means of checking them, it is easy to conceive how such errors may arise, and how easy it becomes to rectify them afterwards when they have been discovered, and the means of correcting them have been pointed out. Where there is no check, errors may arise, similarly, in plotting work which is itself good. These are imperfections which should be leniently dealt with. Let us take the case of the first attempt to construct a topographical plan of a district which had before been a complete blank on the maps. The explorer, let us suppose, has met with sheets of water which may be parts of one large lake, or they may be all separate lakes; but he has received what he believes to be reliable sketches or descriptions of their positions with regard to one another. These representations may agree with his own opinion from the lie of the ground, and he so represents them on his sheet, doing the best he can with the limited time and means at his disposal. Subsequent surveys show him to be wrong, perhaps only in small matters of detail, and, forthwith, some wiseacre, who thinks all maps must be judged by the standard of those—say of the Ordinance Survey of Great Britain,—pronounces him as incapable, or a fraud. The same kind of errors

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may be made in the first efforts to indicate the branches of rivers in a new country ; but surely the best possible, under the circumstances, is better than nothing. Even in the surveys of townships with good instruments, mistakes of the kind here indicated may occur, and they were certainly frequent enough—the surveys of our predecessors. But in those days, good instruments were not so easily obtained, and the pay of surveyors was no better than their work. Referring to misconceptions about the connections of rivers, many of us will remember the case of the upper waters of the Maitland River in Ontario, which for a long time were believed to belong to the Sauguen, as their names to this day testify. Similar errors as to rivers have occurred in all new countries. What better could have been done until more light was obtained? It is easy to point these things out after they have been discovered, and it is seldom that those who are the most uncharitable could have done as well themselves. The work of early explorers is often a labor of love, and it is not to be supposed that those gentlemen, while they were working hard, and doing the best they could to map the country correctly, would put down errors on purpose. How much easier they have made the work for their successors. The latter are glad to take the fullest advantage of their labors, and by means of their maps, even with their imperfections, the way has been made clear for them, and they can see at a glance just what more is wanted. Even the mere indication of a route for travelling by, or getting in provisions, is often of great assistance. For these advantages the surveyors should be grateful, who are thereby enabled to get along in more comfort and lay out more accurate work.

Allowances must also be made for the compiler of other men's work. He makes the best use he can of imperfect or preliminary materials, relying most on what he considers the best ; but after all, mistakes are pretty sure to creep in. The first man to compile a sheet, showing the connections of townships with all their lakes, streams, roads, &c., which were before only to be found in a disjointed form, on many sheets or many scales, does a good work, which for the first time enables us to see our way, as it were, through the country. Such a map is of constant use for reference, even in the process of compiling an improved one, and it would ill-become those who benefit by the use of such maps to sneer at them or ridicule their unavoidable short-comings. The very person who does so is probably the one who has found it most useful, and has perhaps based his own work upon it. It is always so much easier for the average man to find fault than to do the work better himself. Besides, he

imagines he has an opportunity of calling attention to his own accuracy by crying down the supposed errors of others.

The best of our maps are imperfect, and the superiority of the more modern over the older ones is only a matter of degree. We trust the best maps of to-day will be superseded by better ones by-and-by, and if we take into consideration our present facilities and the improved methods at our command, we deserve no more credit for our comparatively accurate or fine work than do the pioneers for their equally honest attempts to do the best they could in their generation. Map making is always a process of development or evolution, and even yet we may not fully realize the future possibilities of the art of representing topography on paper.

